# The Aura and Shadow of Edward Alleyn

Miki Nakamura

Commercial theatre developed in England after the building of a permanent playhouse, The Theatre in the north suburb of London in 1576. As theatrical entertainments flourished, there appeared actors who enjoyed great popularity. Richard Tarlton and William Kempe were famous clowns then. Concerning tragic actors, we can say that Edward Alleyn and Richard Burbage were two major stars of the age. The former, a leading actor of the Lord Admiral's Men, performed mainly in the plays of Christopher Marlowe. The latter, one of the chief members of the Lord Chamberlain's Men and later the King's Men, earned his fame as Shakespearean tragic heroes. This study focuses on these two prominent tragedians of the Elizabethan stage. I would like to consider how Alleyn had an impact on Burbage who we usually assume was the original actor of Richard III, Romeo, Hamlet and so forth. Alleyn won popularity in the first half of the 1590s and he enraptured not only the audience but actors and dramatists; they would have keenly felt a strong magnetism of the star. As a result, some of them probably had to suffer self-alienation or decentralisation. It seems likely that Burbage, a younger actor who belonged to a same theatre business, experienced it. When we read the plays in which Burbage might have acted, we notice traces of such experiences of decentred self.

I aim to look for the shadow of Alleyn and Burbage's engaging with it as they find expression in Shakespearean works. In this paper, which forms an introductory part of the study, first I look at the reputation and acting of Edward Alleyn. Then I move on to analyse Alleyn's performance of Talbot in the first part of *King Henry VI* (*1 Henry VI*) to see what his presence would have been like for Shakespeare and Burbage.

## I. the Aura of Alleyn

Edward Alleyn was born on 1 September, 1566. His father was an innholder, and also a porter to the Queen. We find that in January 1583 Alleyn was a member of Worcester's players. He probably joined the Lord Admiral's Men in around 1589. In October 1592 he married Joan Woodward, step-daughter of Philip Henslowe, who was the owner of the Rose Theatre and a powerful entrepreneur.[1] Alleyn's popularity increased as he played Marlovian protagonists such as Tamburlaine, Faustus, and Barabas.[2] It is certain that by 1592 he had established a very high reputation. Thomas Nashe, an Elizabethan dramatist, gives us a valuable report as witness. He writes in *Pierce Penniless His Supplication to the Devil* (1592): 'Not Roscius nor Æsop, those admired tragedians that have lived ever since before Christ was born, could ever perform more in action than famous Ned Allen' (116). The last three words attest to Alleyn's fame. Quintus Roscius Callus and Clodius Aesop were well-known Roman actors and this comparison makes it apparent that Alleyn was acclaimed as a superlative performer.[3] Also, the title-page of *The Knack to Know a Knave* (1594) reads that the play was staged by 'Ed. Alleyn and his Companie' (Chambers 22), which indicates that Alleyn was considered as the leading star of the company. Thomas Heywood, a dramatist about eleven years younger than Alleyn, states in the prologue to *The Jew of Malta*[4] revived at the Cock-pit that the Jew was played

1 Chambers 296-298, Collier 2-17, Nungezer 4-5, Young 5.

2 Other parts he might have acted are: King Edgar in *A Knack to Know a Knave*; Orlando in Robert Greene's *Orlando Furioso*; Cutlack in a lost play; Sebastian in *Frederick and Basilea*; Muly Mahamet in *The Battle of Alcazar*; Tamar Cam in *I Tamar Cam* (Nungezer 8). We may also add Hieronimo in *The Spanish Tragedy* (Bradbrook 195). Finally, the third Arden editor and the Oxford editor suppose the tragedian who played Talbot was Alleyn (Burns 2, Taylor 4), and my argument below will be based on this supposition.

3 The term 'Roscius' was applied to a skilful actor at that time. As we will see, Alleyn was often compared to 'Roscius' in encomiums.

4 *The Jew of Malta* was first performed in 1589-1590 (Dillon 217).

originally 'by the best of actors' (4). It is clear that Alleyn was 'the celebrity player' (Cerasano, 'Edward Alleyn' 47) in the first half of the 1590s.

There are some noticeable traits of Alleyn as actor. First of all, he was very high in stature. Alleyn would have been significantly taller than most men of his time; maybe he was 6 feet tall with his boots on. As S. P. Cerasano writes, this information helps up to recreate a sense of his stage presence ('Tamburlaine' 178), which must be rather grand and impressive. The next memorable feature of Alleyn is exaggerated movements on the stage. Actually, the name of Tamburlaine, his most famous part, was used in the 1590s to mean a violent style of acting. There is a phrase, 'play the *Tamburlaine*' in *Histrio-mastix* (G); and in *The Discovery of the Knights of the Post* (1597), 'such furious Iesture as if he had beene playing Tamburlaine on a stage' (Levin 63). 'Strutting' was the most familiar one among his movements. Ben Jonson writes about 'the scenicall strutting' (587). Joseph Hall too refers to 'the stalking steps' of Tamburlaine that 'ravishes the gazing Scaffolders' (MacLure 41). In addition, we may remind ourselves of Hamlet's attack on players who 'strutted and bellowed' (3.2.32). Lastly, an excellent quality of Alleyn's voice should be noted. Heywood writes in the prologue mentioned before that Alleyn could speak like Roscius (10-11). Thomas Dekker, who watched Alleyn in a pageant for King James I in 1604, states that the actor delivered a speech with 'a well tun'de audible voyce' (26).

The large physique, memorable movements and a splendid voice made up Alleyn's charismatic presence on the stage. I want to explicate the presence of Alleyn by means of Walter Benjamin's concept of 'the aura.' The presence in 'time and space' (220) is a primary condition for a thing to have the aura, and it is connected with the authenticity. Benjamin states with a reference to the performance of a stage actor: '[A]ura is tied to his presence; there can be no replica of it. The aura which, on the stage, emanates from Macbeth, cannot be separated for the spectators from that of the actor' (229). It can be said, within this framework, that the aura of Tamburlaine was bound up with the aura of Alleyn with those characteristics visible

and audible to theatre audiences. The onstage Alleyn had the authenticity and there was 'no replica' of him.

This could be the reason why, while people then would like to reach and imitate Alleyn, they had to notice an inimitability of Alleyn. Nashe's comment above attests to an unparalleled nature of Alleyn; and Thomas Heywood inserts an interesting phrase in the dedicatory epistle to *The Jew of Malta*: 'so unimitable an Actor as Mr. Allin' (2).[5] I would like to argue that Alleyn was both the supreme object of imitation and *beyond* imitation. What play companies pursued after the hit of Tamburlaine series (1586-1588) was none other than the aura of Tamburlaine/Alleyn. In discussing the responses to *Tamburlaine the Great*, Charles Whitney points out that the marketing strategies of all major acting companies soon demanded imitations and answers to Marlowe's irresistible warrior. Alleyn's style, he writes, became points of reference for shaping meaning and identity (18). Moreover, Cerasano states that Alleyn became 'a "new model actor," a type to which other players could aspire' ('Edward Alleyn' 56). These remarks assist us in a very useful way to look into a psychological state of Shakespeare as dramatist and that of Burbage as actor. On the one hand, it is argued frequently that Shakespeare at the early phase of his career could not forget Marlovian characters and that he must have borne them in mind in creating his characters.[6]

Then, what about Burbage? The exact age of Richard Burbage is unknown, but he was younger than his brother Cuthbert Burbage, who was born in around 1566-1567. So Burbage would be Allen's junior by just a few years. Richard's acting career began in 1584. In 1590 he appeared in *2 Seven Deadly Sins* presented by the Lord

5 Jonathan Bate writes: 'A groundling standing in the pit of the Rose theatre would have gaped at Tamburlaine because of the sheer difference between himself and the Scythian' (109). The difference or distance the audience recognised partly resulted from Alleyn's aura. Benjamin sees the aura as 'the unique phenomenon of a distance (222).

6 See Bate, Chapter 4 and Shapiro, Chapter III.

Strange's company (Nungezer 68). During the period when this company and the Admiral's Men were amalgamated[7], Richard would have worked near Alleyn. It is tempting to think that he was attracted by that famous star then. As Burbage started to perform a part in Shakespearean plays in the 1590s, it would be difficult for him to avoid minding the enormous popularity of Alleyn; he could not but be decentralised. What is more, as Burbage pursued Alleyn, he recognised the inimitability. Such struggle of Burbage shows astonishing similarities to that of characters Shakespeare wrote for Burbage.

Alleyn's and Burbage's acting styles have been studied comparatively by many scholars working on the Elizabethan actors. It is often said that Alleyn's exaggerated style had been regarded as outmoded by around 1600.[8] In the twentieth century, as natural acting became the dominant mode, Alleyn's acting came to get a lower evaluation compared to Burbage's. For example, Michael Hattaway writes: 'Alleyn played roles that give little sense of the ebbs and flows of character's consciousness. . . . His skill must therefore have lain in his capacity for speaking verse and in a kind of action that must have been devoted to the creation of gests hard in outline' (90). William A. Armstrong's re-evaluation of Alleyn was an attempt to check this critical trend. He argues:

> The characters of Tamburlaine and Barabas, to say nothing of Faustus, demand much more than "strutting and bellowing" on the part of an actor; in particular, an ability to dominate the stage, to recite lyrical and oratorical blank verse, and to interpret climactic soliloquies both passionately and intelligently. (83)

Armstrong not only grasps the impressive presence of Alleyn but also considers the possibility of his 'creation' of the role. [9] And he finds 'significant parallels' (85)

7 See Rutter 49.

8 Dillon 95, Levin 63.

9 See Stanislavski for the creation of role.

between the two tragic actors—oratorical technique, for example.

Andrew Gurr, in contrast, notices a clear difference between their performances and concludes that it results in the divergence of style between the Red Bull playhouse and Blackfriars ('Who Strutted' 96).[10] Likewise, Martin Holmes stresses the difference between Alleyn and Burbage in terms of voice:

> Burbage's vocal gifts were different from Alleyn's. . . . He had seen and heard Alleyn often enough to know what each of them could or could not do, and there was no point in trying to be an imitation Alleyn, aiming at vocal effects that the older man could do better. (55)

This remark is interesting for it imagines how Burbage as a younger actor tried to differentiate himself from Alleyn. More recently, Anthony Dawson writes about the question of difference: 'the differences between Alleyn and Burbage may not have been so marked as has often been claimed' (xv). Finally, Janette Dillon, noting the distinction clarified by Gurr, also thinks it necessary to remember the coexistence of the different styles (95-98).

These critics provide us with precious insights respectively, and with a help of them I want to consider a relation between Alleyn and Burbage in the following way, that is: while the acting style of Burbage maybe differed from that of Alleyn in some respects, the former was greatly influenced by the latter. A form of their relationship can be explained by Jacques Derrida's idea of 'hauntology'[11]. Alleyn 'haunted' Burbage, like a shadow or a ghost. I want to argue that the divided selves of Shakespearean characters were something that was close to reality for Burbage. Or, it would have been possible, at least for him, to read these parts in this way.

In *1 Henry VI*, one of the early plays of Shakespeare, Alleyn played the role of Talbot. Edward Burns states that the role of Talbot was designed to exploit and

10 For Foakes, Gurr's theory is 'too neat and simple' (15).

11 Derrida 10. I am much inspired by Brain Walsh, who succinctly employs hauntology as a frame of reference in his discussion of stage ghosts and the performance of history in Shakespearean history plays (157-58).

articulate the charisma of Alleyn (3). The figure of the English heroic warrior shows us what the charisma of Alleyn was like in those days.[12] I concentrate particularly on the Countess episode, which I assume is an informative anecdote about the aura and the shadow-like status of Alleyn.

## II The Shadow of Alleyn

Thomas Nashe watched Alleyn at the height of his popularity, probably in 1592. As he enumerates virtues of drama in the aforementioned essay, he refers to the acclaimed actor's performance as Talbot in *1 Henry VI*:

> Our forefathers' valiant acts, that have long buried in rusty brass and worm-eaten books, are revived, and they themselves raised from the grave of oblivion, and brought to plead their aged honours in open presence. . . . How would it have joyed brave Talbot, the terror of the French, to think that after he had lain two hundred years in his tomb, he should triumph again on the stage and have his bones new embalmed with the tears of ten thousand spectators at least (at several times), who, in the tragedian that represents his person, imagine they behold him fresh bleeding! (113)

This account fully describes a sensation Alleyn brought about. Alleyn at the age of twenty six impersonated Talbot so well that it seemed as though Talbot himself had revived. And he engaged the huge spectators by such a vivid portrayal. This should remind us of Thomas Fuller's praise for Alleyn: 'He was the Roscius of our age, so acting to the life that he made any part (especially a majestic one) to become him' (368). '[T]o the life' was a phrase used at that time to denote a realistic acting, and it is possible to think that Alleyn identified with the character. Heywood, too, in the aforesaid prologue of *The Jew of Malta*, touches on Alleyn's power of transformation when he says, 'Proteus for shape

12 Leggatt interprets Talbot from the standpoint of dramatic genre, tragedy and history. See Leggatt.

. . . so vary' (10-11). 'Proteus' means, allusively, 'one who, or that which, assumes various forms, aspects, or characters; a changing, varying, or, or inconstant person or thing' (*OED* 'Proteus' 2). The word was also applied to an excellent actor. Actually, most familiar example of this is Burbage, who was called 'a delightful Proteus' by Richard Flecknoe. It is fair to suppose therefore that Alleyn, who was well-known for an exaggerated acting, was also good at personation and that Burbage followed suit in that respect.[13]

What is notable in the above passage is its way of describing stage representation. Representing past heroes is an act of revitalizing. The dead person returns to life with the body of a 'shadow' (an Elizabethan word that stands for an actor[14]). Actually, *1 Henry VI* contains many expressions related to resurrection. In the opening scene the Duke of Exeter moans: 'Henry is dead, and never shall revive' (1.1.18).[15] The Duke of Bedford too speaks in a same vein: 'Henry the Fifth, thy ghost I invocate' (52); 'the loss of those great towns / Will make him burst his lead and rise from death' (63-64). And finally, the Duke of Gloucester concludes: 'If Henry were recalled to life again / These news would cause him once more yield the ghost' (66-67).[16] These frequent expressions of resurrection in this play might have impressed themselves on the mind of Nashe. Furthermore, I would like to state that Shakespeare alludes to a resurrecting shadow of Alleyn by way of that recurrent theme.

The Countess episode in 2.3, which is the dramatist's invention, is illustrative of this point. It shows us the Countess of Auvergne's attempt to trap Talbot. When she meets the renowned English warrior, her first action is to ridicule him: 'Is this

13 See Gurr, *Shakespearean Stage* 99, Dillon 97, for personation.

14 *OED* shadow 6b.

15 All the quotations from *1 Henry VI* are from the Arden edition.

16 In the fourth act there is a lament by Lucy: 'O, that I could but call these dead to life, / It were enough to fright the realm of France' (4.4.81-82).

the scourge of France? / Is this the Talbot . . . / I see report is fabulous and false' (14-17). This scene exemplifies 'overarching structure of gender confrontation' (Levine 34) in the whole play. If we remind ourselves of Alleyn on the stage, however, we can interpret their conversation in a different way. In short, it seems that the Countess' scorn ends in encouraging the audiences to take the side of Talbot *and* Alleyn; ironically, or intentionally from a metatheatrical standpoint, she facilitates the audience's admiration of the star by putting his fame into question. [17] Another expression of contempt, 'Alas, this is a child, a silly dwarf' (21) too would have inversely stressed the large body of Alleyn.

A long debate between the two characters over shadow and substance has a special relevance to my study. As she locks Talbot up in the room, the Countess says: 'Long time thy shadow hath been thrall to me; / For in my gallery thy picture hangs. / But now the substance shall endure the like' (35-37). Her disclosure sounds like a desire of a fan of some star who longs to see the person himself as well as the image; we may say that the audiences are asked to appreciate Alleyn's presence, his aura onstage once again. After that, Talbot's words of reply announce a curious inversion of the contrast between shadow and substance:

> TALBOT. No, no, I am but shadow of myself:
> You are deceived, my substance is not here;
> . . . . . .
> How say you, madam? Are you now persuaded
> That Talbot is but shadow of himself? (49-50, 60-61)

The major implication is that Talbot's soldiers that wait outside are his substance or the real strength. Yet, the persistent use of 'shadow' makes us consider its significance in several ways. First, the word suggests that the actor, or 'the shadow' is playing the part of Talbot. In this sense, it shows the limit of stage representation

17 It might also be possible that Shakespeare asks the audiences to bridge the gap, if any, between Alleyn and his reputation in their mind.

and the presence/absence of Talbot.[18] It should be remembered that Talbot himself and the Countess touch on the paradox of presence/absence: 'I go to certify her Talbot's here' (31); 'He will be here, and yet he is not here: / How can these contrarieties agree?' (57-58). Besides, Shakespeare may have had misgivings about characterisation. Feeling nervous about the established popularity of Alleyn, the playwright worried if the character he had made could matched the star's aura. Talbot's words can be interpreted as the playwright's expression of fear, which would be like this: 'My character may not catch up with the authentic Alleyn. It is not substantial or real enough.' Above all, I want to argue that this episode foreshadows and indeed activates the haunting of Alleyn in some plays of Shakespeare.

It is not known whether Burbage acted in *1 Henry VI*. Yet, as he began to take major roles in the Shakespearean company, he had to face the shadow behind and *inside* himself. We find Burbage's engaging with it in some characters. King Richard III suffers a kind of self-division. Both Hamlet and Macbeth refer to 'strutting' on the stage. What is more, there are some traces of decentralisation in the dramas by other playwrights, too. For example, Burbage might have acted the part of Hieronimo in *The Spanish Tragedy* after Alleyn.[19] Then, it is possible for us to see behind Burbage as Hieronimo the shadow of Alleyn as the original Hieronimo. We can find an alternative image of these characters by looking for the shadow of Edward Alleyn in them.

*This study was supported by JSPS KAKENHI (Multi-year Fund) Grant Number 23520301.

18 'The performance of history is a presence on stage that simultaneously draws attention to the absence of the irrecoverable "real" past and the material, historical bodies being represented' (Walsh 157-58).

19 See Kahan 254.

## Works Cited

Armstrong, William A. 'Shakespeare and the Acting of Edward Alleyn.' *Shakespeare Survey* 7 (1954): 82-89. Print.

Bate, Jonathan. *The Genius of Shakespeare*. London: Picador, 1997.

Benjamin, Walter. 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.' *Illuminations*. Ed. Hannah Arendt. Trans. Harry Zohn. NY: Schocken, 1969. 217-51.

Bradbrook, M. C. *The Rise of the Common Player: A Study of Actor and Society in Shakespeare's England*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1962.

Burns, Edward. Introduction. *King Henry VI Part 1*. By William Shakespeare. Ed. Edward Burns. London: Methuen, 2000. 1-103.

Cerasano, S. P. 'Edward Alleyn, the New Model Actor, and the Rise of the Celebrity in the 1590s.' *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 18 (2005): 47-58. Print.

———. 'Tamburlaine and Edward Alleyn's Ring.' *Shakespeare Survey* 47 (2002): 171-79. Print.

Chambers, E. K. *The Elizabethan Stage*. Vol. 2. Oxford: Clarendon, 1923.

Collier, J. Payne. *Memoirs of Edward Alleyn*. London, 1841. Print.

Dawson, Anthony B. Introduction. *Tamburlaine Parts One and Two*. By Christopher Marlowe. Ed. Anthony B. Dawson. London: A & C Black, 1997. vii-xliv.

Dekker, Thomas. *The Magnificent Entertainment Given to King James. The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*. Ed. Fredson Bowers. Vol. 2. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1955. 253-61.

Derrida, Jacques. *Specters of Marx*. Trans. Peggy Kamuf. NY: Routledge, 1994.

Dillon, Janette. *The Cambridge Introduction to Early English Theatre*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006.

Farmer, John S. ed. *Histrio-Mastix*. Edinbrugh: Tudor, 1912. Montana: Kessinger, 2007.

Flecknoe, Richard. 'A Short Discourse of the English Stage.' *Love's Kingdom: A Pastoral Comedy with a Short Treatise of the English Stage*. NY: Garland, 1973. N. pag. Print.

Foakes, R. A. 'Shakespeare's Elizabethan Stages.' *The Oxford Illustrated History of Shakespeare on Stage*. Eds. Jonathan Bate and Russell Jackson. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996. 10-22.

Fuller, Thomas. *The Worthies of England*. London: Allen, 1952. Print.

Gurr, Andrew. *The Shakespearean Stage 1574-1642*. 3rd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992.

———. 'Who Strutted and Bellowed?' *Shakespeare Survey* 16 (1963): 95-102. Print.

Hattaway, Michael. *Elizabethan Popular Theatre: Plays in Performance*. London: Routledge, 1982.

Holmes, Martin. *Shakespeare and Burbage*. London: Phillimore, 1978.

Jonson, Ben. *Timber: or, Discoveries. Ben Jonson*. Ed. C. H. Herford and Percy and Evelyn Simpson. Vol.8. London: Oxford UP, 1947. 562-649. Print.

Kahan, Jeffrey. 'Re-evaluating Philip Edwards's Argument: Could Burbage Have Played Hieronimo?' *The Ben Jonson Journal* 5 (1998): 253-55.

Leggatt, Alexander. 'The Death of John Talbot.' *Shakespeare's English Histories: A Quest for Form and Genre*. Ed. John W. Velz. Binghamton, NY: Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 1996. 11-30. Print.

Levin, Richard. 'The Contemporary Perception of Marlowe's Tamburlaine.' *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 1 (1984): 51-70. Print.

Levine, Nina S. *Women's Matters: Politics, Gender and Nation in Shakespeare's Early History Plays*. Newark: U of Delaware P, 1998.

MacLure, Millar ed. *Christopher Marlowe: The Critical Heritage*. 1979. London: Routledge, 2009.

Marlow, Christopher. *The Jew of Malta*. Ed. James R. Siemon. London: Methuen, 2009.

Nashe, Thomas. *Pierce Penniless His Supplication to the Devil. The Unfortunate Traveller and Other Works*. Ed. J. B. Steane. London: Penguin, 1972. 49-145.

Nungezer, Edwin. *A Dictionary of Actors and of Other Persons Associated with the Public representation of Plays in England before 1642*. NY: AMS, 1971.

Rutter, Carol Chillington, ed. *Documents of the Rose Playhouse*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1984.

Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. Ed. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor. London: Cengage, 2006.

———. *King Henry VI Part 1*. Ed. Edward Burns. London: Methuen, 2000.

Shapiro, James. *Rival Playwrights: Marlowe, Jonson, Shakespeare*. NY: Columbia UP, 1991.

Stanislavski, Konstantin. *Creating a Role*. Trans. Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood. London: Routledge, 1989.

Taylor, Michael. Introduction. *King Henry VI Part One*. By William Shakespeare. Ed. Michael Taylor. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003.

Walsh, Brian. *Shakespeare, The Queen's Men, and the Elizabethan Performance of History*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009.

Whitney, Charles. *Early Responses to Renaissance Drama*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006.

Young, William. *The History of Dulwich College*. Vol. 2. London: Bumpus, 1889.